

Message Text

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ORIGIN INR-10

INFO OCT-01 CCO-00 RSC-01 SS-20 SSO-00 ISO-00 NEA-10 EUR-25

CIAE-00 NSAE-00 DODE-00 SAJ-01 ACDA-19 PRS-01 NSCE-00

NSC-10 INRE-00 /098 R

DRAFTED BY INR/RES/FP:AUJOHNSON

APPROVED BY INR/RES/OD:KAKERST

INR/RES/FP:BMZOOK

NEA/IAI:HHSTACKHOUSE

EUR/SOV:WHLUERS

S/S MR. GAMMON

S/S:SRGAMMON

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O 132134Z NOV 73 ZFF4

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE

INFO USLO PEKING IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 223951

TOSEC 473

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UR, XF

SUBJECT: INR ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET REACTION TO THE

EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT

1. THE SOVIETS HAVE REACTED TO THE SIX-POINT EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT WITH SOME CONFUSION AND MARKED COLDNESS. THIS SIGNIFICANT MOVE TOWARD A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT WAS ACHIEVED WHILE MOSCOW SAT ON THE SIDELINES--THOUGH THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP WANTS TO USE ANY SETTLEMENT NEGOTIATIONS TO STRENGTHEN MOSCOW'S CLAIM TO A GREAT-POWER ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

2. SOVIET PRESS REACTION: TASS, WHICH WAITED MORE THAN 24

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HOURS TO REPORT THE AGREEMENT AT ALL, INITIALLY GAVE

THREE CONTRADICTORY REPORTS. ON NOVEMBER 10, STORY DATELINED CAIRO, QUOTING THE OFFICIAL EGYPTIAN NEWS AGENCY, SAID THE AGREEMENT PROVIDED FOR A RETURN TO THE OCTOBER 22 CEASEFIRE LINE. ANOTHER TASS REPORT FROM PARIS COMMENTED THAT THERE WERE "SUBSTANTIAL DIFFERENCES" BETWEEN THE EGYPTIAN AND AMERICAN VERSIONS OF THE AGREEMENT. FINALLY, TASS REPORTING FROM WASHINGTON GAVE A RELATIVELY ACCURATE ACCOUNT. SOME THREE HOURS LATER, THESE STORIES WERE KILLED, AND THE TASS WIRE SUBSTITUTED A STRAIGHT TEXT OF THE AGREEMENT, CONFORMING WITH THE KISSINGER-WALDHEIM LETTER. BUT EXPRESSIONS OF UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE AGREEMENT PERSISTED. ON NOVEMBER 11, TASS AMBIGUOUSLY CHARACTERIZED THE AGREEMENT AS "A PROTOCOL

ON THE OBSERVANCE OF THE CEASEFIRE, THE ENDING OF MILITARY OPERATIONS, AND THE RETURN OF TROOPS TO POSITIONS THEY OCCUPIED ON OCTOBER 22," THE SAME DAY, AUTHORITATIVE PRAVDA COMMENTATOR YURI ZHUKOV STATED THAT KISSINGER "SUPPOSEDLY" REACHED AGREEMENT WITH BOTH EGYPT AND ISRAEL, BUT THAT THIS REPORT SHOULD BE TREATED WITH "UTMOST CAUTION" UNTIL PROVED BY EVENTS.

3. THE LINE OF OCTOBER 22: ONE REASON FOR COOLNESS INVOLVES THE ISSUE OF A RETURN TO THE CEASEFIRE LINE OF OCTOBER 22 --A POINT ALWAYS MENTIONED IN THE SOVIET PRESS REACTION TO THE SIX-POINT AGREEMENT. THE AGREEMENT PROVIDES ONLY FOR DISCUSSION OF A RETURN. HOWEVER, PRIOR TO ITS CONCLUSION, FIRST DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER KUZNETSOV PRIVATELY CHARACTERIZED ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL TO THE OCTOBER 22 LINE AS "ESSENTIAL". THIS WAS ALSO STRESSED BEFORE THE AGREEMENT BY THE SOVIET PRESS. THUS, EGYPTIAN ACCEPTANCE OF THE SIX-POINT AGREEMENT UNDERCUT THE SOVIET POSITION.
 4. THE SOVIET ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST: IN A WIDER SENSE, HOWEVER, MOSCOW PROBABLY VIEWS THE AGREEMENT AS A SETBACK FOR SOVIET AMBITIONS TO PLAY A GREAT-POWER ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. KUZNETSOV'S RECENT TRAVELS TO CAIRO AND DAMASCUS, AND FEDAYEEN LEADERS' FORTHCOMING TRIP TO MOSCOW SHOW SOVIET INTEREST IN KEEPING A HAND
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IN MIDDLE EAST DEVELOPMENTS. AT THE NOVEMBER 7 KREMLIN RECEPTION, KUZNETSOV TOLD THE AMERICAN CHARGE THAT IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT WASHINGTON AND MOSCOW CO-OPERATE IN FINDING SOLUTIONS TO MIDDLE EAST PROBLEMS. ON THE SAME OCCASION, A HIGH MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OFFICIAL COMMENTED THAT NEGOTIATIONS LOOKING TOWARD A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT BE CONDUCTED UNDER "APPROPRIATE AUSPICES" -- MEANING US AND SOVIET INVOLVE-

MENT.

5. THE SOVIET PRESS HAS GIVEN ONLY SKIMPY COVERAGE TO THE KISSINGER TRIP TO THE MIDDLE EAST AND RESUMPTION OF US-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS. MOSCOW DOUBTLESS VIEWS THESE DEVELOPMENTS AS A CONTINUATION OF SADAT'S PAST ATTEMPTS TO OBTAIN A WESTERN OPTION, ATTEMPTS WHICH STRAINED SOVIET-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS AND CAUSED PROBLEMS FOR MOSCOW. THE ACHIEVEMENT OF AN EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT WITHOUT SOVIET PARTICIPATION MUST SEEM TO MOSCOW ANOTHER DEVELOPMENT IN AN UNWELCOME TREND--THE MAKING OF A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT IN WHICH THE USSR PLAYS LESS THAN THE ROLE IT DESIRES. RUSH

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: WAR, ARMISTICE, PRESS COMMENTS, FOREIGN RELATIONS, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 13 NOV 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: elyme
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973STATE223951
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: AUJOHNSON
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19731136/aaaabans.tel
Line Count: 128
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ORIGIN INR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: elyme
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15 NOV 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <15-Nov-2001 by willialc>; APPROVED <23-Jan-2002 by elyme>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INR ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET REACTION TO THE EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT
TAGS: PFOR, UR, XF, US
To: TOKYO
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005